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ABSTRACT

Terms such as "demographic and economic contraction," "decreasing resources," "no-growth," and "decline" indicate changes in educational resource allocations. While some experts from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries complain about reduced education budgets, others assert that the industrialized world economies have recovered and are relatively stable. Patterns of planned responses to changing resources vary in the European community. This paper examines some prevailing problems and how they are being solved. One exception to European recovery is England, where Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government froze teacher and professor salaries, causing a catastrophic shortage of science teachers. The main austerity problem in western Europe involves decreasing population, specifically birth rates that have declined by one-third over the past decade. The educational consequences are (1) superannuated teaching staff with long-term contracts and few retraining opportunities; (2) reduced financial allocations; and (3) decreasing enrollment in teacher colleges. Responses can be enacted according to sectoral, overall, or longitudinal resources reductions (funds, time, or personnel) and usually occur in combination. This paper identifies response patterns according to strategic choices (continuing system-based efforts, reallocating money to priority areas, mobilizing community and private resources, and stabilizing external support) and illustrates each choice with specific examples. Efforts to overcome the negative impact of resource shortages depend chiefly on institutionalized opportunities supporting creative problem-solving and risk-taking. Included are 19 references. (MLH)

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RESPONSES TO AUSTERITY:
EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES FROM HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN THE 1980s.

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(1) WHAT IS AUSTERITY?

Demographic and economic contraction, decreasing resources, no-growth, decline: Such terms indicate changes in the allocation of resources in education. Some experts from OECD countries complain about the reduction of money-spending for educational tasks and school development. Others underline that the economies in the industrialized world have recovered and that they are relatively stable now.

The patterns of how to respond to changing resources vary in the European Community. We will look at some prevailing problems and how they are solved "against" or in spite of austerity.

What is a response? According to semantics, it is an intended / reflective plan or model rather than something which merely happens in a passive and resonant way. A pattern of response is an active attempt to overcome difficulties which are associated with changing practices of allocation policies.

(2) AUSTERITY IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

The European Community is currently made up of twelve member countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and United Kingdom.

With the recovery of the economy of the industrialized countries and partly as a motor for it, the European Community's economic and financial conditions are generally speaking good. As a result, school and education no longer have

to exist under restrictive conditions. There is, however, one exception to this which is England, where Margaret Thatcher's government froze the already low salaries of teachers and professors. The effect on recruiting science teachers is a catastrophe. The country needs several thousand physics teachers but only a handful has been willing to accept a teaching position which pays 50% to 70% less than industry. The situation is much more aggravated than the situation experienced by the United States in the 60's.

What one could learn from the British example reads: A critical mass of financial compensation and public esteem of the teaching profession is necessary to have a teacher corps. And that is true even with 10% to 15% unemployment in England. In the Netherlands or in the Federal Republic of Germany where teacher salaries are three times as high as they are in England school administration can select the best students from the university like Mercedes or IBM.

Thus, austerity has an effect on the educational sector through limited economic resources; a situation similar to what Brazil has experienced over the past years. It leads to special selection of the teacher corps. As in the case of England it does not have an effect on modern technological equipment in the schools. While the government cut back teacher salaries it supplied the schools with modern equipment. Austerity is more noticeable in the personnel sector than in the material since the cost of personnel in the industrialized countries is considerably higher than that of equipment.

This austerity problem is, however, not typical for the European Community.

Austerity in the European Community is mainly of a different nature. It is a question of population. In the majority of the European Community member states the birth rates have decreased by one third over the past ten years. The consequences are not only economic, administrative, and logistical, but to a certain extent they produce problems from an educational standpoint.

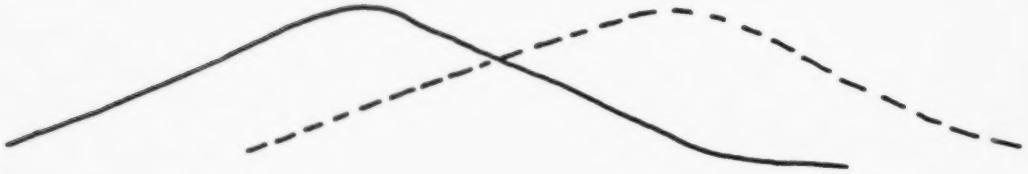
Problem 1: Superannuation of teaching personnel

Problem no. 1 is the superannuation of the teaching personnel. As opposed to the situation in the USA, most teachers have long term or even life long contracts. The result is that access to the teacher corps is almost impossible for young teachers and the teacher corps becomes superannuated.

The problem of superannuation cannot be compensated for by increased further education as there are not enough training facilities available. Neither politicians nor administration feel they are in a position to assume responsibility for the increased costs.

Problem 2: Changes in the financial allocation

The decline in the student population in schools and universities can be forecast exactly. The ministries of finance reduce or freeze the costs in advance. The costs are frozen before the maximum number of students reaches the university. The following chart shows this problem:



——— investment and creation of new permanent positions

– – – – student enrollment

The ministries of finance know that jobs and funding once given can hardly be reduced due to the long term contracts prescribed by law. Should jobs and funding be according to the maximum number of students, a personnel surplus would follow.

Austerity problem no. 2 thus is mainly an upper secondary school and university level problem. The decreasing student population for these two areas can be relatively accurately forecast. Another factor to be taken into consideration is an ever increasing disinterest in university studies as a result of the job market.

Problem 3: Decreasing enrollment in teacher colleges

This problem is mainly one for teacher training colleges and schools of education e.g. in the Federal Republic of Germany, in France or in the Netherlands. The number of faculty positions is being radically limited. The result is a relatively fast restructuring of the schools of education.

On the other hand the situation has had an extremely positive effect on research: When the school administration said that no new teachers would be employed for certain subjects in the next five to ten years students did not study education. The professors, however, have life long contracts. This means that they have intensified their efforts in further education, especially professors of a single subject (e.g. for physics education or language teaching).

What can be learnt from this? Not much really. Taking into consideration the life long contracts for the teaching faculty and a decline of 31% in the student population nationwide, there are very few possiblities to intervene. The student teacher ratio of 25 to 27 pupils has been set for secondary schools. It would be worth investigating to see whether this ratio has any effect on classroom activities. The

(3) PATTERNS OF RESPONSES

The following patterns are of analytical nature in order to explore the scope of possibilities for dealing with austerity actively. Responses can be enacted in view of sectoral, overall or longitudinal cuts of resources (funds, time, personnel). Normally such cuts occur in combination, and therefore we prefer to discern patterns of responses according to peculiar strategic choices:

- # Continuing system-based efforts
- # Reallocating money to priority areas
- # Mobilizing community and private resources
- # Stabilizing external support

Continuing system-based efforts

In case a specific school development approach is part of a public policy with a longer duration, the approach is rather likely to survive.

Example I

SIPRI (Switzerland), a project on studying Swiss primary schools, encompassing developmental tasks and their implementation, stands for a system-based school improvement effort. The effort is clearly supported by the Conference of

Directors of Education, the Swiss teachers' organizations, and the participating "Kantone". SIPRI began 1980 and ended 1986 working on improving evaluation of students by teachers, implementing new teaching methods, intensifying cooperation between Kindergarten and primary school teachers, and opening the school to parents This case could not suffer substantially from conditions of austerity because it received continued backing from various levels of authorities and interest groups (cp. Heller 1986 and Miles & Ekholm 1985). In addition, the interim success, carefully evaluated and made accessible to multiple audiences, made it impossible to stop or reduce the effort. The innovation process was set up and maintained step-by-step which allowed for a multiple feedback-controlled improvement and stabilization of the process itself (more about such requirements for sound institutionalization work see Miles, Ekholm & Vandenberghe 1987 and Hameyer 1987).

Example II

A large-scale project on Renewed Primary Education in Belgium (see van den Berg & Vandenberghe 1987) was similarly anchored in institutional structures, carefully sequenced and based more on the systematic evaluation findings from innovation research rather than on looking only at money or other provisions. A similar approach with comparable impact is the MAVO large-scale effort at individualization in secondary schools (The Netherlands).

Example III

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the common core curriculum is anchored in "Lehrpläne" (syllabus), sometimes drawing upon recommendations made by the Conference of the 11 Ministers of Education and Culture. Improvement efforts in this area - normally carried out by state-level commissions - are relatively indifferent towards changing resources because feedback mechanisms within the patterns of syllabus work (cp. Haft, Hopmann et al 1986) allow for early adaptation to emerging state-level demands and policy.

Example IV

Hauge (1987) describes a longterm school improvement effort about SALE (student adopted learning) and integrated days for projects in Norwegian basic schools. The effort started in 1974 and lasted until 1986. It is a longterm school-based development approach involving various authorities on different levels anchored in many system units on the regional and local level. The more the system is involved and identifies itself with the change, the more difficult it is - according to all these examples - for restraints to succeed (be they financial, organizational, administrative or other).

Reallocating money to priority areas

In some countries it is being reported that the available in-service capacities are being partly reorganized : The preparation of teachers for NIT (new information technologies) gets top priority. A comparable trend is to be expected in biotechnology/biogenetics, and the revitalized discussion about educational values indicates a renewed emphasis and call for priority. This all can imply, although it has not been documented until now, that traditional subjects have to release personnel for new tasks and give them more time for new courses.

Another example for shifting priorities can be observed on the schoolbook market. Some companies concentrate on the most promising content areas which promise relatively large target groups, others diversify their strategies, e.g. producing NIT software instead of or in addition to schoolbooks, or other materials such as LEGO which is a popular system in the Federal Republic of Germany to play with, also for educational purposes (see also FISCHER TECHNIK which provides systems for technical subjects and computer literacy).

Funds and grants are more focused on a limited number of priority areas, evidently on much fewer areas than in the seventies (cp. Federal-State-Commission in the Fed. Rep. of Germany which promoted at least 8 to 10 areas in the seventies whereas now it supports predominantly 3, i.e. NIT, special education and vocational studies).

The OECD reports in its study on "future educational policies in the changing social economic context" (1979) that a transfer of funds had already taken place in the seventies. Public spending shifted from "general education to vocational training" and "from the budgets of ministries of education to the budgets of employment service" (77). This study adds that at the same time more equitable distribution of resources was sought, notably for the benefit of underprivileged groups and of adults with low educational attainments (redistribution of funds).

Mobilizing community and private resources

Closely connected with decentralizing efforts is the policy of central authorities to share the load of overhead expenses for education more effectively with communities, i.e. regional and local agencies for supporting and sustaining schools This measure has its origin in the seventies (cp. OECD 1979).

In some cases industry is invited to cooperate and share (e.g. computer companies provide hardware for educational purposes in the hope that increased sales will follow). Additionally, some states support joint ventures with private companies and various organizations to prepare teachers for jobs outside the public schools: Several industrial sectors have certain needs to employ educational specialists for vocational training tasks and further qualification. The number of retrained teachers, however, who received new occupations, is relatively small.

As to pre-school policy, there is a German policy decision that pre-school education must be accessible for every child. This policy did not necessarily lead to extended central support rather than putting a larger load on community resources and on parents with incomes above welfare level.

Universities are also encouraged to establish closer links with industrial funds and to initiate joint ventures. A special program for this policy was set up by the Federal Minister of Education and Science, Federal Republic of Germany, in 1986. Additionally, there has been an attempt to set up private universities which implies a gain in the supply of higher education capacities without the state having to pay for it.

In the private school sector public contributions are more strictly handled (cp. Mattern 1984) with the effect that public money is set at zero-growth or below.

Stabilizing external support

External support structures are built up step-by-step over a longer period. They are given more or less institutional power and security, and in most European countries the staff, at least larger sections of the personnel, has job security over several years or even lifelong. The time and investment needed for setting up external structures is much larger than the possibilities for immediate reactive cuts. Additionally, support structures in The Netherlands, in Sweden, in West Germany, in France and other countries also serve for the implementation of educational policy-making. Therefore politicians would restrict one of their own important measures to enact decisions.

In the Netherlands (cp. van Bruggen) we find one of the best external support networks in the world. In spite of ongoing financial discussion the network is seen both from the policy point of view and from educational practitians as a necessary element for achieving satisfactory quality in education. No substantial cuts are reported in this area except that structural changes according to a new law for the support system are under discussion. It is a good tradition in the Netherlands to protect this valuable system against changing money spending policies (in more detail cp. contributions in Van den Berg, Hameyer & Stokking 1987, and Louis, Velzen, Loucks & Crandall 1985).

Also in the Fed. Rep. of Germany there are no substantial contractions of money resources for state-level institutes visible. Each of the 11 states (Länder) has one institute, more or less directly linked to the ministries and in every case responsible for in-service teacher training in addition to other tasks (cp. Frey 1982).

(4) CONCLUDING REMARKS

Of course, nobody would deny the value of sufficient resources for education and school improvement. It should be noted, however, that a number of additional factors are responsible for the readiness and the capacity of the educational system to improve, e.g. system-bound characteristics and factors which are associated with the quality of the improvement process itself. It does make a difference as to how something new is initiated, implemented and institutionalized (cp. Miles, Ekholm & Vandenberghe 1987 and Hameyer 1987). Without intending a direct comparison to education, we consider the findings of Peters & Waterman (1982) rather interesting, particularly the

fact that success depends to a considerable degree on institutionalized opportunities for support in creative problem-solving and risk-taking. Somebody who proposes something new is appreciated and allowed to do it rather than hindered. We do not find such a condition in European schools, and it is unlikely that it could be promoted under the condition of changing the allocation of resources.

System-based efforts are very difficult to change even by means of budgetary policies as institutional structures in education once having been established are rather stable and indifferent against external demands for change (also reported in Weiss & Weishaupt 1987). The same is true for the supply of teachers which has lead to a highly improved pupil-teacher ratio since the seventies (cp. fig. 1). The flexibility of the state to reduce the number of employed teachers or those who are looking for work immediately is limited. This is especially true in states where teachers get a longterm contract or are civil servants with lifelong job security.

Our contribution has shown that there are efforts within educational policy-making and the educational system to overcome a negative impact of a shortage of resources, it being understood that there is a continuous need to improve and to implement powerful responses to austerity.

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